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STRAWS.

BY COLONEL HENRY WATTERSON.

I.

**IT IS THE
UNEXPECTED
THAT HAPPENS.** IN nothing is the speculative predilection of the average American shown so markedly as in the field of political conjecture, where, in the event that occasion requires, it may be humored without cost or risk of any sort. We are, indeed, a nation of politicians, if not of gamblers, and he is but a poor specimen of the race who, born a sovereign, cannot serve at once as his own prime minister and prophet. Hence statesmanship with us is the reverse of an exact science ; out of all relation to mathematical precision ; being in a state of actual and constant war with geometrical progression, to say nothing of other forms of progress.

A surmise to-day as to the condition of parties to-morrow has nothing whatever to rest upon except the filigree of imagination, the frail and trellised but insubstantial frameories of guesswork. One man's prediction is as good as another's. Nor is this peculiar to the present moment. It has been the rule these fifty years ; and it springs not less from the temperament of the people than from the exigencies which that temperament constantly forces upon the party managers.

Party platforms were long ago made only to be broken. Party nominations have long been the children of accident. From Polk to Harrison, in the national conventions, it has been the unexpected which, with a single exception, has come to pass. That exception was Buchanan, who owed his good fortune in this particular to an honorable, though an irksome, banishment to the Court of St. James's during the stormy years that, following the inauguration of Franklin Pierce, laid each of his rivals in the dust and made him the available candidate in 1856. Polk, Pierce, Lincoln, Hayes, Garfield, Cleveland, and Harrison were each a new man in the presidential arena, whose nomination was brought around by the laws of expediency, and each proved more or less a surprise to the country. In the cases of Polk, Pierce,

and Garfield the surprise was great and universal. In those of Lincoln and Cleveland it was anticipated by hardly more than a year of popular knowledge that such persons had an existence.

Among the papers of the late Justice Stanley Matthews, of the Supreme Court, may be found a very curious document partly in the handwriting of President Polk. It is a newspaper article urging the nomination of Martin Van Buren. With this the writing of Mr. Polk leaves off, and another pen takes up the theme, urging the nomination of Mr. Polk for *Vice-President*. This queer example of the eccentricities of American politics was written and printed in Mr. Polk's home organ in Tennessee less than a month before his own nomination for the Presidency. Yet at the time it appeared he was a very doubtful entry, as turfmen say, for second place.

In the organization of the Liberal movement of 1872 there was objection among a certain set of reformers to Mr. Greeley, and therefore to Mr. Whitelaw Reid, who appeared at Cincinnati as Mr. Greeley's personal representative; but it being argued with much plausibility that Mr. Greeley could in no event receive the nomination, and that the support of *The Tribune* might be needed in the coming campaign, Mr. Reid was finally admitted to full fellowship, solely to clinch Mr. Greeley and *The Tribune*. The accession of Johnson and Arthur to the Presidency baffles melodrama; whilst, except for what followed, the elevation of both Lincoln and Cleveland would rival the *grotesquerie* of comic opera.

II.

Taking up the cue of the unexpected, which so
SUPPOSE,— often happens,—with historic examples for a warrant,—let us make a brief survey of the political field and humer the mood both of speculation and the speculator with regard to coming events, possible and otherwise.

Suppose Governor Campbell is reëlected in Ohio and it is indicated clearly that under his leadership Ohio can be relied on in 1892 by the Democrats: is there not good reason to believe that he would enter the next Democratic National Convention with an almost irresistible prestige? Suppose Governor Boies is reëlected in Iowa by a good majority, and Governor Campbell is defeated in Ohio: would not that make Governor Boies a formidable candidate? Suppose the Republicans should carry New York in the coming

fall election : what effect would this have upon the Cleveland and Hill factions in the Empire State ? Suppose none of these things happens, but that New York comes to the next National Convention either divided in her choice or opposing outright the nomination of Mr. Cleveland : would that not force the party to quit New York altogether and to seek a candidate elsewhere, and—in this event—where ? Mr. Gorman and Mr. Carlisle live on the wrong side of the line ; and Mr. Morrison lacks the united support of Illinois. General Palmer has passed the age of promotion to party leadership. Of course Governor Pattison is possible, particularly if Pennsylvania goes Democratic in the fall elections ; whilst others, of whom we yet know nothing, may be “ hid in the bushes.” Hence it is that, unless the coming elections procure the Democrats something decisive in Ohio, Pennsylvania, or Iowa, the party will have to meet and dispose of the war between Cleveland and Hill, with a very scant margin of choice to go on when both are laid aside as unavailable ; a contingency which, under the circumstances, seems not unlikely.

These suggestions are put forward in the way of the merest speculation. Touching them, one man’s opinion is nearly as good as his neighbor’s. A few weeks more will dispose of the most of them. But the faction fight in New York will not down so easily. It seems here to stay until the next National Convention at least, if not after. It is the one stumbling-block across the Democratic highway. If the party is beaten in 1892, it will owe its defeat largely, if not mainly, to this. Thinking Democrats cannot fail to regard it with apprehension, and disinterested Democrats must feel that, if it is not disposed of in some satisfactory way, the outlook for the next National Democratic Convention will be stormy indeed. Unhappily, New York politics, and the politics of the country at large, have very little assimilation, and hence external pressure exercises less influence upon New York than upon any other State of the Union. It is, so to say, a nation unto itself.

III.

It will thus be seen that outside the State of New York the Democrats are in a complete fog for a candidate, whilst in the State of New York the contention for ascendancy between two rival leaders has lashed the elements into a gale of the most threatening description.

A TALE OF TWO
LEADERS.

It is understood that this family quarrel had its origin in matters chiefly personal and of no great import. But it may be doubted whether there was not back of these a set of irreconcilable conditions. New York is, and always has been, both strong and weak in national counsels,—strong because of her electoral vote ; weak because of her dissensions.

The events which brought Mr. Cleveland to the Presidency and Mr. Hill to the Governorship abounded in much that is picturesque in American politics. If either had, in the outset, realized the strength of the other, the succeeding antagonism, so hurtful to both, might have been averted. But in the beginning the two were wholly undeveloped ; and their development marks the date of their separation. Who could have foreseen that a man taken from the body of the people, and advanced to the Presidency without previous training in national affairs, would so soon and so firmly grasp the reins of power, seize the salient points of large ideas and current drifts of thought, and give to airy policies a definite purpose and phrasing ? On the other hand, who could foresee that the comparatively unknown politician who had been left behind to administer, *ad interim*, home affairs until a successor was chosen, would himself appear as that successor, and easily so, winning repeated victories against odds, and building up an organization unequalled since the days of Mr. Tilden in his prime ? That the Governor appreciated the President is more than likely ; but there is no evidence that the President appreciated the Governor ; and herein lies Mr. Cleveland's organic defect of character. He sets too much store by measures, too little by men.

One would hardly expect this in a man brought up in the school of the most every-day and commonplace affairs ; who had been a sheriff and a mayor, and an all-around attorney in an interior city. It is related that Mr. Cleveland made a good sheriff and a good mayor, showing great assiduity and an unusual turn for details. He brought with him to the national capital these excellent gifts ; but he soon added to them the display of an extraordinary self-confidence, particularly in one so unprepared, and a surprising taste for experimental politics, personal and practical. He cut and slashed right and left. In his hands precedents were scattered like cobwebs. His aim seemed to be to recreate the public service anew and after his own

image. He beat down opposition with a success startling to the discomfited. He made issues with a precipitation that staggered the doctrinaires. It is not denied by his enemies, partisan or personal, that he gave the country a wise, safe, and clean administration. But he lost his reelection ; and the circumstances attending this loss lie at the bottom of the difference between him and Governor Hill, impairing the usefulness of both.

Governor Hill carried the State of New York as the Democratic nominee for Governor, and Mr. Cleveland lost it as the Democratic nominee for President. That is a concrete fact. If the two had been friends, it had been enough to threaten their relations ; but, being upon terms, to say the least of them, not very cordial, it formed the basis for immediate and for subsequent attacks upon the loyalty of Governor Hill wholly unjust to the Governor. The simple truth is that Mr. Cleveland lost the vote of New York on account of the friends he had chilled into indifference or converted into enemies, and that Governor Hill carried it because of a vote which might have been cast as well for Mr. Cleveland. Herein Governor Hill showed himself the better politician, not an unfriendly or unfaithful colleague ; for Mr. Cleveland was nowise ignorant of the situation. But whilst Governor Hill, with admirable energy and tact, pursued the methods common to all parties in the very mundane business of carrying elections, Mr. Cleveland, all unconscious of impending danger, his eye fixed upon the star of his destiny, was soaring through the clouds of great but intangible ideas.

IV.

THE COST OF TOO MUCH GREATNESS.

But Mr. Cleveland's loss of the Presidency, contradicting all theories about the successfulness of success, did not lose him the hold he had gained upon the confidence of the people. It strengthened it. There was a feeling among Democrats that he had, by brave and honest service to the country, earned his reelection, and that in some way he had been cheated out of it. Naturally the disappointment was general, and the coincident election of Governor Hill fell in among other things with this disappointment. In a sense, it tarnished a glory Governor Hill had fairly won, and was made to create sympathy for Mr. Cleveland

and to reflect discredit on Governor Hill ; all most wrongfully. But here, it seems to me, Governor Hill failed to take a large and luminous view of the case.

The victim of circumstance can rarely quarrel effectually with circumstance. If he cannot make his peace with it, he had better acquiesce in it, or seem to acquiesce. Evidently Governor Hill is not a doctrinaire. He is a practical politician and he is a man ; and he disputed the imputation with more or less of spirit. The result is an apparently irreconcilable conflict, in which Mr. Cleveland and Governor Hill have everything to lose, and nothing to gain, whilst the party to which both claim allegiance is the sufferer.

If Governor Hill could have seen his way to it, the Democratic party and these two eminent party leaders would stand to-day upon much higher and solider grounds. It may not have been in human weakness, but it would have been in worldly wisdom, had the Governor recognized the fact that his election as Governor and Mr. Cleveland's defeat as President, on a common ticket, made his own succession to the Presidency uncertain. If there was between them an outstanding account, this balanced it, and Governor Hill could have afforded to make a sacrificial offer of an olive branch. Mr. Cleveland could not have refused. Indeed, it was eminently a case where sacrifice was sagacity and generosity prudence. It would have set at rest, and at once, all issues between leaders who were too strong to quarrel. It would have made them one in an irresistible movement, supported by the noblest popular enthusiasm. It might not, indeed, have ended in the election of Governor Hill to the Presidency,—though it would have taken that direction,—but it would have done more than this ; it would have made him a national leader and an unchallenged power among men. Without these attributes of popular leadership, the Presidency is the merest bauble, and, whilst Governor Hill is making himself strong in the State of New York, he is in reality doing his great talents for affairs injustice with the country at large.

In a word, these two party chiefs ought to see that they are wasting a vast amount of good fighting material. If each could take to himself a little of the other, both would be mended. As it is, the very advantages they may gain — the one in the country by the attractive side of his character and personality which he shows the masses ; the other in the State by his dextrous and

astute handling of local and muscular forces—work only evil to the cause that ought to be, and undoubtedly is, dear to them both. In the end they may find that they have lost all; for the Democratic party at large is growing very restive under New York turbulence, and it only wants a good pretext, and some one to head it, to throw off the dominion of the Empire State once and for all.

V.

Is it not, after all, the issue, and not the candidate, that counts in the election of a President? He was something more than a humorist who observed that by the time the personality of a presidential nominee was spread out over the whole country it grew rather thin! The immense popularity of Mr. Clay could not save him from defeat; and, in later times, the examples of General Hancock and Mr. Blaine point the same moral.

In the nature of things this must continue to be so, and more so; the question of availability, and not of individuality, occupying the first place in the thought of the nominating conventions. It seems to be the destiny of our republic to go on augmenting its grandeur and its power—already concentrated beyond the dreams of the most extreme federalism by the railway and the telegraph—until, a republic no longer except in name, its chief magistrates become mere types, chosen solely because of their representative character, and not because of any especial genius or fitness of their own.

The rival pretensions of Mr. Cleveland and Governor Hill, serious as they are and hard as they may be to settle, must yet be held by Democrats as of second-rate importance to the laying of the lines on which the next great political battle is to be fought.

If American statesmanship had any sequence to it, and parties were governed by any fixed, known, and reasonable laws, this question would have been determined by the defeat of Mr. Cleveland and the subsequent enactment of the McKinley Tariff Law. In 1888 the fight was made by the Democrats distinctly on the tariff. It was made, as the politicians say, "on principle." Those who made it gave reasons for the faith that was in them; and these reasons are as good now as they were then. They are better; because the McKinley Act is an intensification of all

which the advocates of revenue reform have held hurtful to the country. If its predecessor was bad, it is worse, and if it was wise and just to attack the former, it ought to be still wiser and more just to attack the latter.

In truth, the conflict between a revenue tariff and a protective tariff—between those who maintain that the government has no constitutional right of taxation except to raise the moneys needed for its own support, and those who maintain that taxation ought to be adjusted so as to favor certain classes and interests—is an irrepressible conflict. It constitutes an issue which will down at no man's bidding. Mr. Blaine's scheme of reciprocity, designed by that astute party leader at once as a flank movement against the Democrats and a bridge for free-trade Republicans, is a proclamation of weakness, a signal of distress, as notable as it is bold. Reciprocity is simply free trade in broken doses, and surrenders the whole case of protection as a dogma. But it will not serve the purpose of its author if the Democrats are equal to the emergency and to their duty. This latter is to stand by their guns and to fight it out on the line of 1888 until they have substituted a revenue tariff, on a peace footing, for the present protective tariff, with its high scale of war duties.

Just here we encounter an obstacle which ought to have no place in our party politics, and has none in the party politics of any other country. There is always from certain quarters a clamor for "more money," and at the present moment this takes the form of a demand for "more silver." The terms "free coinage" and "unlimited coinage" are trolled from stump to stump with a volubility only too significant of the absence of information, whilst resolution after resolution is passed by county meetings and district conventions from which an intelligent explanation might be sought in vain.

The question of coinage is a very complicated question. It is not national, but international. There is not, and never has been, any fixed relation between gold and silver. Our own coinage act is an experiment. Any amendment to it must be experimental. Those who talk the loudest commonly know the least. They ride the waves of popular prejudice unconscious of the depths below. A few simple, salient facts, however, are obvious. The country must have enough money to transact its business, and as the national-bank notes are withdrawn, they must be re-

placed by some form of circulating medium. Thus far silver or silver certificates have supplied this need, and the cry is "more." The debtor thinks that with "more" he can pay his debts. The creditor fears that "more" means merely a flood of debased money, and the loss or abridgement of his claim. Meanwhile the demagogue, with varying degrees of ignorance and resonance, divides his time between noisy extremism and confused hair-splitting, intelligible only to followers as ignorant and excited as himself.

During the last session of Congress the Force Bill gave a great impetus to the silver movement. By the aid of the silver Republicans in the Senate, the Democrats were enabled to defeat that obnoxious measure. Turn about proved, in this instance, fair play, and the result was that many Democrats voted for the Free-Coinage Act who could not have brought the consent of their judgment thereto as a detached or original proposition. As a consequence, we have a tolerably life-sized division of opinion on the subject within the Democratic party.

I do not believe that either side to this controversy is likely to get just what it expects. There is less to be feared by the one class, and to be hoped by the other, than they think. As usual, the mean, middle ground will be found safest, and in the end it will prevail. But, truly, if the skies should rain silver, if silver dollars should be heaped up in the valleys, so that those who are making such an ado about more money could fill their sacks and baskets, and could cart it away with them, it would, under our unequal tariff system, soon find its way back to the present custodians of the wealth of the country, leaving the tax-ridden farmer as poor as ever.

If the Democratic party allows an experimental question like this, a question on which we are not agreed, to make a breach for the Republicans to march through, and relegates to second place a great question like revenue reform, on which we have had our travail, and are at last united, it will meet defeat, and will richly deserve it.

But I do not believe anything of the sort. We shall in next year's National Convention find as to silver the same common ground that we found in 1884 as to the tariff. Then, as now, we were divided. Then, as now, we had to deal with a question for which we were not prepared, and to which the country was not edu-

cated. We shall repeat the wisdom of concession in 1892, leaving something and trusting something to the kindly offices of time. In that event we shall win ; and, as a result of our victory, we can proceed with an unbroken line of enlightened and conservative reforms. In any other we shall lose ; lose all hope of a liberal money policy and of revenue reform, gaining, as the first fruit of our folly, the Force Bill, and all the evils of another indefinite lease of power to a majority which, always domineering, will, if again triumphant, be more ruthless than ever.

HENRY WATTERSON.